Beyond the ocean - a short dialogue with R.Rolland

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"Ce n'est pas la paix que je cherche, c'est la vie." - **R.Rolland**, in **Jean-Christophe [IX]**[1]

D.Parfit[2] describes *self-interest theory* as a type of metaphysical theory - meaning a theory which tells what one *should do* provided some situation - according to which one should do what makes one's life go as well as possible. He analyses this type of theory from a logical point of view, discussing whether or not such theory should be rejected on the basis of counter-logical properties such as being *self-defeating*, for instance. Such approach of metaphysics represents for me a tendency in contemporary philosophy to project a human phenomenon onto the dimension of language and logics, while assuming that the analysis of the *image* of this projection does provide information on what has been projected. Counter-logical properties which appear in the projection of metaphysical theories may be ultimately resolved when following back this projection until having a direct contact with the mental reality they are concerned with.[3] For instance, in *Reasons and persons*, in Schelling's answer to armed robbery [p. 29], the paradoxical statement that it can be rational to act irrationally appears less paradoxical when considering the *points of view* of the persons involved in the situation: from *my point of view* it is rational to act in such a way that my act is perceived as being irrational *from the point of view of the robber*, considering the set of actions which are accessible to me in order to respond to the problem I am facing - being robbed.[4] When we forget the projection itself, we may confuse its input and its output. In particular what shall distinguish metaphysical theories in the dimension of language and discourse, the '*absolute*', may be confused with metaphysical theories themselves. The attempt of Q.Meillassoux [5] to recover the absolute may derive from this confusion, prompted by the necessity of metaphysical reflection in order to shut off nihilism[6], but rendered inept by the fact that it is the absolute which generates nihilism.

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[1] Translation by the author: *"It is not peace that I am searching for, it is life."*

[2] **D.Parfit**, *Reasons and persons*, Oxford University Press (1984).

[3] In the same way as logical paradoxes that were found in set theory during the XIXth century could be solved by considering back 'sets' as, first and foremost, the result of a mental process of collection.

[4] Such effect of the point of view on the consideration of a common situation can be found in many other examples, influence which anyone who is used to focus exclusively on the objective dimension of the situation [which may in fact be defined as what is invariant, in a certain way, from the point of view; in particular objects, or space] may ignore (not in an abstract way, but when living the situation in question). When having a deep affection for another person for instance - in particular when this affection seems irregular - one may wonder if and fear that this affection is unrequited (what if it leads me to actions which the other person would think of as *emotional harassment* ?). Unconsciously, one may react to this fear - searching to cancel it - by acting in contradiction with one's feelings for the other. However this cancelation appears as an effort of care for the other only from one's own point of view, while the other may perceive it as violence, contempt.

[5] **Q.Meillassoux**, *After finitude: an essay on the necessity of contingency*, Bloomsbury Academic (2008).

[6] I would argue against this project for the reason that nihilism as a philosophical position is the result of a psychological condition rather than the result of a plain choice of position.

Perhaps these reductions are seen as an accepted cost for the fear of dogmatism often derived from a discourse which deals with the content of metaphysical theories - for such a discourse somehow ends up being '*metaphysical*' itself, meaning absolute, imposing individual ideas on others without objective reasons. If this is so, this reasoning is certainly a consequence of the fact that the philosopher's discourse is meant as having a social function - the one of acting on people minds. Although I may accidentally act this way, I do not suffer this function. This text is only for me, out of necessity, to delve plainly into metaphysics and attempt answering the essential question: *what am I ultimately searching for?* (what do I ultimately want ?). Concomitantly, considering this question restores *meaning*, which the collective discourse, by dwelling exclusively in the dimension of language and logics, has eventually dismissed. '*Naturally*', one may think: after all, the function of this collective discourse - to deliver knowledge and understanding which are useful for all - implies that it must remain objective and not be concerned with individual subjective thoughts. The contradiction is only apparent: the question may be, as an act, meaningful for me only, but an understanding of it shall be eventually meaningful for all.

The following is a series of thought patches, which render in a somehow coherent way main areas of the metaphysical activity happening my mind. I found in the sequence of these patches repeated echoes with R.Rolland's thoughts, and a certain natural evolution: the question *what am I ultimately searching for ?* follows from questioning a certain faith in the search of truth which in its social implementation has disappointed me. When such faith is so close to one's (chosen) identity, it is difficult not to condemn the will itself. I found that in the consideration of the experience of the ocean, precisely because of its simplicity, can be seen different affections of the relation with the world in general, and a good ground on which to attempt understanding what exactly these affections consist in. I see more clearly, because of this conceptual construction, that it is meaning, and life, which I am naturally searching for. In order to maintain them, creation is necessary. I leave this reflection on some philosophema intended to provide a direction for this creation.

―――― What am I ultimately searching for ? ――――

The will may be seen as an inner force which acts on the decisions that one takes provided a situation. Although it is not reducible to them, it is manifested in what I shall call *intents*, which are visible precisely for the reason that they consist in directions of the will which can be designated statically: for instance an object [the written script itself, when I will to *have written* something], or the activity of writing itself. Furthermore, statical designation implies that these intents can be put in relation with other intents, enabling reasoning. In particular they form a '*compositional*' structure. For instance: **1.** I want to have money in order to buy food and eat; **2.** I want a job in order to get money; I can thus say that I want a job in order to eat. The object of any metaphysical theory is to climb this structure of intents up until its source in the will. What makes such a theory popular is its ability to point at an '*original intent*' which roots all the others, offering a simplification of natural metaphysical activity, which comes with mental pain and the feeling of getting lost. From a personal point of view though, there is no absolute reason for adopting a metaphysical theory on this criterion. For some of them (in particular '*secular*' ones, down to earth[7]) there is actually a relatively simple way to '*prove*' - not in mathematical but transcendental terms - that the will can't be reduced to this original intent, for the realisation of this intent in imagination does not lead to the absence of will.

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[7]Considering for instance the original intent of remaining alive (in the biological sense of this term), or sexual desire (S.Freud) for all the intents non reducible to life preservation.

The question of *why would I like to write ?* participates for me to the quest of the source of the will. As a matter of fact, I have formulated[8] some responses to this question, rooting the will of writing in other intents. However, is it possible to reason about the source of the will without to actually climb the intent structure ?

1. *Negative, indirect determination ?* — Recurrent in philosphy, the notion of '*happiness*' is almost a synonym for what one is ultimately searching for. At the root of all metaphysical formations lies the projection of this notion onto the intent structure - following the idea that the will is reducible to the intent structure. However the problem with this notion is that it lacks reference. Would it be possible, as the result of an understanding of the structure of the experiencing subject, to find such a reference ? - pointing at particular structures of mental contents ? In this direction, we have relatively straightforward *negative* determinations: $\mathcal{I}$ am not happy when I am depressed, for instance; one can point at some structures of mental contents which correspond to this idea, for instance the ones that I called recurrent negative memories. We would have an indirect reference - meaning that there is an experiential path whose ends is what is referred to - if '*being happy*' was identical to the absence of what determines it negatively. However there is no such identity, for structures of negative mental contents exercise an attractive force on the mind - just like by gravity we are attracted to the ground[9]. Therefore there can't be happiness without another force to counter this gravity (in other words happiness is not a passive *state*). The fact that this gravity is countered does not mean that there is no constraint on life in this world, simply happiness comes with the habit not to feel these constraints unless it is (locally) necessary. Choosing the way $\mathcal{I}$ want to live is in particular choosing which constraints shall apply to me, and this compromise depends upon what $\mathcal{I}$ am ultimately searching for.

2. *Roots in the sky* — The intent structure, which may well characterise what in a person results from the effect of her relation with her world, is a tree whose roots are vanishing from the scope of the subject's experience[10] - just like the inverted trees of Hinduism, whose roots lie in the sky; although $\mathcal{I}$ am able to designate them (dynamically), they are difficult to describe. Keeping in mind the whole structure of intents matters, because it reminds me that none of the intents in it is properly origin of the will, and of the possibility to modulate this tree, in particular re-ordering it, suppressing or adding branches.. [11] When considering a change in this tree, what serves as a criterion for choosing to actually make this change or not is the adequacy to the '*parent*' intent in the tree. For this reason it is important to have a grasp on the roots of the tree, for otherwise, how can $\mathcal{I}$ know if anything $\mathcal{I}$ do matters at all (to me) ? The nature of the place these roots come from implies however that they are not graspable by the mind as well as objects are; contrarily to objects, I need to re-experience them constantly to have a grasp on them, and I shall doubt about all conception about them which does not come from direct, present experience.[12]

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[8]**S.Gangloff**, *Why II write ?*, for instance '*understanding myself*', '*solving transcendental problems*' - one of them being the existence of recurring negative memories (**S.Gangloff**, *The ghosts in my mind*).

[9]Similar ideas can be found in **S.Weil**, *Gravity and Grace*

[10]Because of this, there can't be any authority across subjects for the question which matters here.

[11]for instance after along time searching for a mathematical object which possesses certain fixed properties, I may come to the intuition that such an object might not exist and shift to the search of a proof of non-existence.

[12]For this reason, it is difficult to grasp them without metaphorical language, in which words are loosely identified with things. By the way, such loose identification is the cause of possible apparent contradictions in a metaphorical discourse (the holy grail is sometimes said to be a cup, sometimes said to be a rock, but it may well be both), for it does not preserve 'structural relations'. For instance, let us say that I use the term 'square' in order to say that an object is red, and 'circle' to say that it is flat. Then it is perfectly possible to say that an object is a square and a circle: here the fact that a square can not be at the same time a circle is not preserved by the identification with the chosen references.

With these terms, we can provide here a proper definition of *idolatry* - where the common contemporary definition of *idol* as object of worship leads naturally to practical nihilism - as the retention of an earthly intentional structure, which is itself the consequence of a reduction of 'the' world to the world of objects - or equivalently facts - coming with the incapacity to maintain a *relationship* with the invisible.[13]

3. The 'meta-intent' of intent resolution — In the context of a reduction of this type at the collective level, the perception of the will becomes saturated with intents - for they are themselves graspable as objects - in such a way that the will is perceived as a collection of intents[14]. Abstracting from the particulars, the will becomes the resolution of intents itself - and the feeling that $\mathcal{I}$ have at the moment of resolution, as when I reach an object I projected to reach. This is why we come to search for power: the more power, the more capacity to resolve intents, and the more resolution. The mind ends up constantly *in tension*, until it comes to the will of getting out of this tension (but without any intuition of where to go then)[15]. The resolution of intents becoming ultimate intent can be found in particular in the intellectual world - or the world of *research* - where the resolution of problems tend to become more important than exploration and *understanding* of the world, than *meaning* in general. The reduction of 'the' world to the world of objects also roots the ideal of production, as the meta-intent of object revelation, or object creation (in particular under the form of concepts[16]). Should I though, like G.Bataille[17], reject intents themselves (what G.Bataille refers to as '*projects*') ? This thought, in fact, leads to a paradox, for I would form the intent of the absence of any intent.

——— **Why do 'we' search for the truth ?** ———

— or: beauty, freedom, love .. ?

They are all in principle sources of meaning, ways out of the reduction of the world to the world of objects[18]. They still host a logic of constant in-tension towards a never-actual infinity.[19]

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[13]In particular, contrarily to Jean-Luc Marion (*De surcroît*), I think that it is not possible to characterise idols in purely in terms of what appears to me (independently of the will), for instance the *saturated* character of a phenomenon: idols are a factor of closure of the world, while saturated phenomena are often gateways towards its outside.

[14]This reduction roots the logics of attraction in the western culture: the attraction towards another person is naturally directed towards the whole of this person, however since the world has been projected onto the world of objects, one searches in this person an object or collection of objects which form the direction of the attraction. The reasoning on the structure of intents which result from this operation has negative effects on the resolution of the will, for, when adopting the point of view of the other, it is difficult to believe that one can be satisfied with the idea that the other is attracted towards a part or collection of parts of me. It is only the belief in a certain form of relationship which blinds one from this intuition.

[15]This self-negation, as a result of the reduction of the world to the world of objects, is the 'proof' that the possession of an object or any collection of objects can't be what I am searching for. As a matter of fact, we may doubt that the will ultimately directs itself towards any thing outside of it, but rather towards the adoption of a form.

[16]This appears in the definition of philosophy by Deleuze and Gattari.

[17]**G.Bataille** - *L'expérience intérieure*.

[18]Believing in any is believing is 'something' which lies beyond all thing, beyond the horizon of what appears 'in' sensorial experience. Such belief is tied to the structure of the subject.

[19]The infinity which we search then is the actual and complete understanding of the world, which - we should know it by now - is only a dream: it will never be present in the experience. Therefore constant source of frustration. Should'nt we instead compose with mystery and search for a way to arrive at what seems more important: the possibility to have joy at will ? - the discovery being only a particular way of having joy. As a matter of fact, mystery may more important for joy than understanding. On the other hand, the possibility to have joy at will relates to freedom, not understood as the exercise of choice between alternatives, but rather the actual independence of perception from the abstract architecture of time and associated processes - such as filtering the 'content' of experience from whatever does not respond to long-term intents.

I believe that the reason why the route towards these '*noble idols*' is so natural is that when they are designated in the collective discourse, the designation directs the attention towards what constitutes meaning *in* them. As a matter of fact, what we are searching for in the search of truth might not be '*truth*' itself, but something else that is found accidentally in this search.

What is it that we find in the search of truth ? — (i) *The presence of absolute otherness* — In mathematics at least, this is common sense. Mathematicians enjoy constructing *elegant* proofs of true statements. However it should not only be considered as a non-necessary aspect of research conducted by mathematicians. The more elegant a proof is, the more its structure is intrinsically related to the objects involved in it; elegance does not make the proof true, but signifies a deeper understanding of these objects and how they are related to each other. This observation naturally extends beyond the field of mathematics: a reasoning is elegant when there is a certain (unexpected) rigidity relating parts of this reasoning which were not considered synchronously in its construction. This speaks about the objectivity of this reasoning: in the scope of theoretical consideration at time t, the subject may distort its experience according to its will and arrange the conceptualization of this experience in order, for instance, to fit in a pre-conceived theory; the presence of a '*long-range*' rigidity lowers the probability that such distortion actually happened. From the collective point of view, truth is *usable*; from the analysis above, I take that from the individual point of view, on the other hand, elegance means the actual presence of something absolutely other, and the subsequent effective negation of the feeling of solitude which derive from the thought of solipsism. This is what I am searching for when sharing my ideas with others: I particularly like the moments when they coincide surprisingly with the ideas of others; I think that what happens in such moment is that because the same idea originates from outside of myself, it appears more important than when it was only my idea, and because it is more important I am letting myself focus on it at the cost of sacrificing other possibilities.

Sometimes such convergence of ideas happen at the collective level and some intellectual domain is created, sometimes not, for convergence remains local - I think this is often the main factor of creation at the collective level, not that the ideas which remain local matter less.

(ii) *The sentiment of order* — Subjectively we also search, in the conceptualization of sets of true statements, a sentiment of *order* : all meaningful part of the conceptualization of the world which consists in these true statements has its own designated place in it, and thus is not left hidden and forgotten; in other words, all meaningful part is accessible. Hence the identification of the activity of unveiling 'the' world and imprinting its structure in the language in such a way that it makes this structure appear immediately.

As a consequence of the fact that language is a collective construction and that it reflects only partially the reality of 'the' world, there are at least two possible ways to relate to order (and subsequently freedom): (1) accepting the order of language constructed collectively and its constraints; one finds freedom in it for it provides the possibility of being heard, and have one's ideas objectified (in the same sense as above in point (i)); with this comes confidence in them and the freedom of exploration without self-doubt; (2) rejecting the collective construction, and find in any experience a source of truth, independently of the particular conditions created by the collective structure in order to find truth from inside it; transforming into one's order anything which emerges out of one's own chaos; this comes on the other hand with constant self-doubt.[20]

For me, a determinant factor for choosing the second was the latent sentiment of something deficient in my vision of the world, and the sudden discovery that 'the' world vastly differs from the way I conceived it thus far. It is difficult to wrap my mind around the idea that this is a factor only about myself, and concomitantly difficult to prove the contrary. In any way, it became

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[20]There is a certain similarity between this opposition and the one of Apollonian and Dionysian conceptions of beauty: in fact the sense of beauty is the same in both conceptions, what differs is only the way to arrive at it.

clear for me that I could '*complete*' myself only by an exhaustive exploration of what was thus far invisible for me - invisible in the strong sense that I did not even suspect the existence of this invisible. As a matter of fact, I have cultivated originality in my approach of research and in my thoughts for the collective vision of the world not to affect this exploration.

(iii) *On the nature of the belief in love* — This '*love of the world*' roots for me the belief of the concept of love that the Christ incarnated. When it is directed towards a person in particular, it sees this person as a particular point of view on 'the' world, easily unseen, easily neglected or assimilated into my own point of view, which when seen properly *completes* it. Love sees beauty where it was not seen before. On the other hand, the common notion of love consists in the corruption of the former subsequent to the reduction of 'the' world to the world of objects, in which persons are seen as objects [where a person-as-object is not simply the matter hosting it but the person as projected into my point of view rather than a proper point of view]. Belief in love takes the meaning of *growth into*[21] - 'the' world as such.[22]

——— High height defection of the will ———

Wondering why we search for the truth, that is implicitly questioning the possibility for this to be an ultimate intent. This questioning reveals other psychological patterns, hidden in the concept of truth, which attract the mind. It is natural to consider this attraction as good in itself when one is used to listen to one's '*inner voice*' without any form of filter. For a long time I have tried without success to change my own self in order to reduce it to the dimension of tension towards the infinity of truth - believing that this disengagement from plain being would be sufficient to erase metaphysical tension. However as a ghost remains life and its constant call, sign of a self-contradiction of the will through its relation with the intellect. As a matter of fact, the intent of self-reduction originates in the intent of belonging to a certain community, which is built around the dimension of being to which one chooses to reduce itself to.

The will of holding a position in the community was for me a reaction against the fear of the displaced authority of others, against which I formerly opposed silence: this represented the legitimacy of breaking the silence granted by authority of the position holder. With time I discovered two essential facts: that it is easy to misuse authority; and that the constitution of the community itself relies on the psychological infirmity of the individual constituting it.

Feeling deceived by this overarching unconscious intent of belonging, I chose to follow my own path rather than adopting a social position in the community - besides, it might be simpler to deal directly with my own psychological infirmity. For some time I thought that self-doubt is subsequent to social isolation. I think that it remains along this path, *underneath* it: the consequence of this apostasy, for the mind, is the necessity to *rectify* one's own path, however in fact any justified doubt about what one believed the most in shall result in distrust of one's own will, leading to constant self-doubt. Is what I want what **I** want ?

It would be straightforward to distinguish the will which comes from inside me and the will which is the result of the action of an external force on me, and to define what I really want as the former. However the reality is not so simple. What should count as 'me' ? If I am considering a part of me as not really me, am I right to do so ?

It could be that all self-contradictions of the will are caused by the subject's transcendence, self-separation. In the same way as any technology which researchers develop might be used for military or industrial purpose against the interest of people, might any cognitive '*technology*'

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[21]In french, the syntactic proximity between *croître* (to believe in) and *croître* (to grow) suggests a semantic proximity and the interpretation of belief that I use here.

[22]Contrarily to what I have been thinking for a long time, I think that the concept of love is not reducible to the idea one's self sacrifice: the Christ's sacrifice does not participate to the essence of his love, but contributed to the evidence of its meaning to the witnesses of this sacrifice.

have a negative effect on the subject ? *Representation* is a case of this notion of technology, the possibility to create an image of an external 'object' supposed to serve as a faithful representation of it when it is absent, hence of reasoning (causality, in terms of use) about it. When the object and its representation are identified, as well are identified the will of having this object and the will of having what the representation refers to (or that I believe it refers to) in the world. However the will may act on the representation and distort it, as well as the relation between this representation and what '*surrounds*' it in my mind, realising the possession before it is actual. One might just loose the possibility to get the real object in the end, or have it and realise that it is just not what one has imagined.

Another consequence of consciousness on the will is *locality*: $\mathcal{I}$ may want to have some object for some short time, only because $\mathcal{I}$ find myself in a certain temporary situation (for instance cultural affection, the consequence of me remaining in a certain social environment) - but this is not what $\mathcal{I}$ would want independently of it. Besides, what sense would it make to put any effort into getting it if one minute after $\mathcal{I}$ will not want it anymore ? Follows the intent of, as J.-P. Sartre[23] called it, *totalisation*: transforming the will so that it is not fragmented in time, defining intents primarily be-cause of one's intent structure and not the situation (despite the fact that the situation can't but having a causal impact on it).

The intuition of totalisation was underneath the intent I had to write a text which would contain and structure all my thoughts, which I could not just let go of, then forget about it and just live. As a matter of fact, intellectual activity, in particular in mathematics, is like being a mole constantly digging tunnels underneath the ground, often times frustrating because the earth is too resistant. Long effort only for short moments in which one's own world opens suddenly but mildly. That I have chosen to take research in mathematics my profession corresponds to what I have called *meta-intent of intent resolution*; but I chose this because of a belief - which comes from the way I entered in the world of mathematics - that meaning is created only in a sudden way - the phenomenon of illumination which H.Poincaré described[24]. Letting this go would have meant a certain enclosing into my own world and the sentiment of finiteness, the self-similarity of experience in time, as a result of habit. On the other hand, a certain practice of philosophy maintains constantly the opening of the world, sometimes suddenly in an accidental way; as a habit of thinking, it is not felt as an effort.

The way I think about philosophy is that of progressive *organisation* of one's mind, which consists in the combination of *integration* and *segregation* of parts of oneself. This has to be progressive, for no self-understanding can happen suddenly.

——— From nihilism to 'depth' in the relation with the world ———

Unlike Q.Meillassoux, I think that re-establishing the '*absolute*' can't dissolve nihilism, for the reason that, even if we do so at the collective level, nihilism will remain as a '*ghost*' response to something that the absolute denies, for it does not see it - any absolute thinking is a form of withdrawal from the opening of one's world and what it takes as absolute, despite what one would like to think, is dependant upon a particular point of view. On the contrary, I believe that only a sensibility to meaning as such and an effective opening of one's world may dissolve nihilism - at the individual level.

Nihilism originates in the idea of *illusion* [25] - when despite awareness of the phenomenon, identity between the representation and the real resists to negation - applied to metaphysical

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[23]**J.-P. Sartre** - *Critique de la raison dialectique*

[24]**H.Poincaré** - *The foundations of science*

[25]In a similar way, *free will* also originates in the separation of the representation and the object: in order to preserve the will, one inhabits the representation, be-living in it against the reality - where nihilism denies the imperative of metaphysical theorising. Both remain as ghosts anyway.

theories in general. As a matter of fact, it may well be absolute thinking which leads to nihilism, which on the other hand confuses metaphysical theories with a particular way to exercise them. It is through a close examination of this confusion that one should attack nihilism, and not through the exercise of its cause.

From the individual point of view, nihilism is a tempting position. For me, it has taken the form of reaction against the reduction of oneself demanded by the community at its gateway. It can lead to hedonism - reduction to the elementary dimension of existence - or, as for me, to an exhaustive - and exhausting - exploration and embrace of the world as such, in its infinity, in order to see clearly and render visible what the absolute thinking neglects. Reaction against and detachment from the scientific view on the world: as J.Patočka[26] has put it, this point of view, in the obsession of truth, operates an 'algorithmic' selection of thoughts according to if that they are adequate or not to an unconsciously chosen mode of truth; which enters in contradiction to the mode of truth that is necessary for an accurate vision of the world as a whole - the one of pure *meaning*. Discursive formations in general are opposed to it in the same way; for this reason I have wanted to experience, study and conceptualise how meaning is created at the interstices between these discursive formations - that is, not only considering combinations of objects or methods from different disciplines, but the reality in between the objects each one take as its own, that is invisible to them precisely because of this. I enjoyed to see these interstices *saturated* with meaning[27] - in a sense, saturation[28] is a glimpse of infinity, a sign of opening of one's world, as the existing considered surpasses one's perceptive capacity.

A proper nihilist would not only refuse metaphysical theories professed in collective discourses, but also in oneself - forcing oneself not to follow any of these theories, at least consciously. For my part, even after rejecting the idea of belonging to the community and the subsequent complete adhesion to its principles, I still chose to believe in something; but I had operated a rupture, a separation from the world[29]. Of course the world was still 'there'; however in this configuration $\mathcal{I}$ is at all time the actual cause of any action of the world on me. This is a well shielded form of relation to the world, but lonely.

I remember how I described my inner self five years ago: alone on a sailboat in the middle of the ocean, pushed by the wind behind me, pushed to live, and explore the world; but pushed *nowhere* in particular. Curiously I was only proud to see clearly this truth for myself. The image itself, I had it in mind, but I did not really understand what it meant[30]. As a matter of fact, it reflects two simple aspects of a mode of relation with the world which, through culture, I have ingested in my unconscious mind. **1.** The wind which pushes me from behind, as the idea of a blind and chaotic force which lies behind the '*illusion*' that all which exists has been wanted, designed and build, can be found in other thinkers which all in their own way participated to historical nihilism, by the conception of absence of direction at the collective level, such as H.Bergson, A.Schaupenhaur, S.Freud [declinations of H.Bergson's *élan vital*], A. Compte [with the notion of *progrès*], and others. As a matter of fact, the *movement* produced out this force became for me, just as for Heraclitus, the ontological basis of all being, a movement without hope - as manifested in S.Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Retrospectively, I think that I believed it only for it is the essence of the world once it has been reduced to its surface, to what is immediately visible - that is, without faith. In contrast with this, faith replaces in meaning the existence

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[26]**J.Patočka** - *The natural world as a philosophical problem*

[27]Related to this, I have progressively become aware that for me research consists beforehand in the search of meaning, while for the intellectual society, research consists in projects, of creating knowledge. Which should it be ?

[28]For a discussion on *saturated phenomena*, see **J.-L. Marion** - *De surcroît*

[29]It is the same separation that is underneath Descartes' *cogito*.

[30]Interestingly enough, I found later the following sentence written by Lou Andreas-Salamé in a letter to Sigmund Freud: *traverser un océan sur un frêle esquif, telle est bien notre condition humaine.*

of a direction and the confidence in its existence. It is the same confidence which allows me to open my own world - and this is what makes it matter - using language: in order to see what a dynamical designation means [hence making it appear in my world], I have beforehand to trust the existence of an 'object' in its direction - although I may sense it without properly *seeing it*, as I can touch something without seeing it. **2.** In this vision, the ocean '*represents*' a certain way to apprehend space, and time as well. Retrospectively, one of the deepest philosophical idea which I have taken from Hegel relates to the dialectics between modes of thoughts about space and time represented historically by Galileo and the Church. Behind the modern-day interpretation of Galileo as the defender of freedom of thought against the oppression and obscurantism of the Church, I discovered that this opposition reveals another one which is inscribed in the structure of human psyche: that which the Church has been opposed to might not have been the theories and discoveries of Galileo and others, but the reduction in the vision of the world that these discoveries - outside of reach of the discourse professed by the Church - tended to enforce. That is, the removal of subjective *meaning* from the conceptualisation of events. In this vision, because meaning is distrusted, space and time only remain, as a structured collection of locations and instants which possess no center - for no event is more meaningful than any other. Hence the vision, reflected in my metaphor above, of a space uniform and empty - the ocean.

I believe that my interest in the study of the structure of the experiencing subject is rooted in this: the idea that rendering the structure of what is not there yet, visible (and explaining the mystery of its presence), might make it more resistant to the reduction that we are tempted to make. One simple aspect of it is *depth* of the relation with 'the' world. The intuition that this term points to might be translated in the following way: how much the structure of meaning that ones may find in it is present in mine. The culture of a superficial relation is precisely the condition of possibility of the *spectacle society*[31] we live in, that is, in my interpretation, the one in which all is spectacle, in the sense of a crafted saturated set of experiences of a manifest richness - where this richness is great enough for the eye to be satisfied without looking astray, whether it is by ego ($\mathcal{I}$ am able to see all at once all there is to see) or by idleness.

Without one knowing - for everything else is hidden by the spectacle - this richness does not satisfy the heart (which the eye does not believe if it believes only what it sees). As a matter of fact, in the world anything can happen, since it is unseen. Furthermore, what one does not find behind the spectacle, one searches it in the accumulation: of objects, or of *events* - no matter what the meaning of the event. We collect, encapsulated in recurrent crafted events, experiences in which we have, even before experiencing, projected what there is in it to experience[32]; this is another factor of enclosing.[33]

Another more fundamental condition of possibility of the spectacle society is the absence of reflection on what *believing* in something means. Instinctively, we find the meaning of this word in our experience of illusion: in this sense, believing in something is holding the identity between this something and its representation - without perceiving that they are distinct. Holding to this interpretation keeps one from the experience of another form of believing, which roots the concept of faith. In this direction, as I have discussed already somewhere, believing means *growing into*. It is a channel through which one grows into 'the' world, or equivalently, lets the world grow into oneself. This is faithful, I believe, to Heidegger's concept of *being in the world*: it is accepting to remain inside it, part of it, that is to let the world act upon and change oneself. Necessary '*fall*'.[34]

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[31] **G.Debord** - *La société du spectacle.*

[32] Idea which I found somewhere in Heidegger, who was condemning movies, which appeared in his time as a form of entertainment, precisely for this reason. This is also related to the critic of the idea of project by G.Bataille.

[33] Let us note that it is the same phenomenon which underlies the ideal of productivity, even for oneself.

[34] This is reflected in the spectrum of religious positions such as atheism, deism, and theism. The former consists

This does not mean that this relation with the world has to recover its '*natural*' mode - which has in it the reason for Descartes' position of rupture with the world, that is the illusion. For my part, I believe in an '*effective cogito*': instead of placing my belief in what I cannot deny - and subsequently consider as true - I do place it in what has a positive effect on me; this, I believe, permits a necessary fall in the world, while creative abstraction out of this being in it shields against illusion.

<div align="center">—— R.Rolland's <i>sentiment océanique</i> ——</div>

In a letter to S.Freud, the fifth of December 1927, R.Rolland has defined to him what he called '*sentiment océanique*' as the simple and direct sensation of the eternal, which for him roots the religious sentiment - a sensation that he would have liked him to analyse from his point of view. Behind the term '*océanique*', the idea of participation of the individual to the whole, like a wave, although it is somehow distinct from the ocean, never separates itself from it.[35]

Why this discussion ? It is probable that Rolland would have liked Freud to pursue the idea of Spinoza (and Kant after him) to ground religion in a rational relation of the subject with its own experience.[36] After reading his novel *Jean-Christophe*, I believe that Rolland has himself experienced this feeling continuously since his youth: in Jean-Christophe **III**, he describes a sudden perception that the actual world is a lot wider than what he has seen previously, through intellectual activity - as if reducing the distance which separated it from him - which I recognise for I have also experienced it myself. If I may enrich the description of this feeling, I would say that it is more the contact with infinity that it refers to, rather than the eternal [which I think was a way for Spinoza to connect reason and religious in a formal way, for '*it is of the nature of reason to regard things under this species of eternity*']^{37}; furthermore, it is different to recognise that $\mathcal{I}$ am part of the whole and to feel it; and it does not matter that $\mathcal{I}$ feel $\mathcal{I}$ am part of *the* whole, rather that $\mathcal{I}$ feel part of an *infinite* whole.

Why the image of the ocean ? I think that the reason lies in the fact that it is one of the 'simplest' experiences one can have in imagination, for which the action of subjectivity on its conceptualisation is the most visible - in particular through the affect of an existential feeling - - for instance, a negative one such as the one I have described above, and a positive one such as the *sentiment océanique*[38]. Also it is the most natural ground on which to understand it.

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precisely in the belief that what is referred by the word 'God' is an illusion; the second consists in accepting the designation while projecting it onto the objective dimension of the world (finding in it the closest object which comes close what is designated as 'God'). These are two positions which I have successively held in the past. Retrospectively, I would say that the difficulty which a person of the second form of belief has to understand a person of the later comes from the fact that it does not consist in a position, but rather in a particular form of movement, not towards anything which manifests itself in the visible, from the current point of view, but outside of the point of view, after accepting to 'fall' from the position - or even the form of position - held.

[35]The response of Freud to Rolland was that this sentiment of fusion with the whole is similar to the one of fusion with the mother: such a connection has to be severed in order for the individual to become autonomous. I believe, on the contrary, that this type of analogy does not apply here. In fact, all relationship is a necessary constraint. Why would the relationship with eternity be closer to the one with the mother than other ones ?

[36]For instance love and faith are rational for the effect they have, from a point of view which can relate the cause and this effect. From another point of view love and faith may seem an arbitrary choice for the same reason. Here is thus another instance of the effect of the point of view.

[37]As a matter of fact, there is a relation between the ideas of infinity and eternal, which may lead to confuse them: what is eternal remains along human history, can be discovered, forgotten, rediscovered, etc - it can be so precisely because it is eternal. On the other hand, what dismantles itself with time under consistent look does not allow any sentiment of infinity when it is looked into. In a sense, only what has the character of the eternal allows the sentiment of infinity.

[38]As a matter of fact, I have also used the image of the ocean in a positive way in *The ghosts in my mind* in order to define what I would like my mind to '*be like*' - filled with the sentiment of wonder which comes with the first contemplation of the ocean.

If I may tweak a bit this image, I would like to consider two ways[39] to look at the ocean, in particular its horizon and its infinity. **1.** On one hand, I may say that the ocean seems '*infinite*' in the sense that I '*know*' that behind the horizon which I see, there is more: more water, maybe a couple of sailboats, a steamer, some whales, a sky of a different color, until my imagination reaches another land. There is unknown; but only the kind of unknown which I can still conceive [in the sense that I can project a see of possibilities, but at no time during this projection is there the sensation of presence of the unexpected]. There is infinity in the possibility of continuing indefinitely this imagination process [which can go in other dimensions as well: behind the perception of water, there is its nature, etc.] **2.** On the other hand when I imagine the first time I have seen the ocean, what comes to my mind is the idea of actual presence of infinity in my experience, not the infinity of the imagination-description process of what may lie beyond what I see according to my actual conception of the world, but rather the impression of presence of a being which lies radically outside of this conception; in this appears the sentiment that 'the' actual real world is a severely larger than my proper world, even having no graspable *extension*.

The former view is the consequence of a mode belief, itself resulting from fear and will for control, applied to the projection into 'the' world. Essential aspect of a living existence, *meaning* - which differentiates the former view from the later - disappeared unnoticedly in it, in the same way a relationship can disappear. When meaning reappeared in my world (in a similar way as the *sentiment océanique*), I felt and kept feeling the need to preserve the relationship that it consists in (which is for me the reason for thinking about God as a person), to the point of *self-sacrifice* - meaning the sacrifice of the screen-self which I have been creating and cultivating, a sort of avatar behind which I have hidden from the world, by fear.

The idea of R.Rolland that the *sentiment océanique* roots the religious sentiment is quite clear, if we see that religion precisely consists in the will and engagement to preserve meaning. I believe that furthermore, this idea can make sense, for a rational mind, of certain religious concepts. For instance the idea of '*being born again*':

> *Jesus responded and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* - **John 3:3**

In John 3, Jesus met Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. This is how he reacted to what Jesus said:

> *"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"* - **John 3:4**
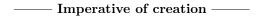
This is the kind of reaction anyone would have who is not used to *metaphors*, and the fact that one can use words in order to designate a certain *reality* which does not correspond to the usual meaning of the words used in order to designate it [here this usual meaning for being born is that of going out of one's mother's womb]. What does '*being born again*' mean then ? We can tweak the usual meaning and say that being born is having entered the world. Above I have made a distinction between *my world* and 'the' world. This should become clear: '*being born again*' refers to a second time one enters the world; that is here entering 'the' world after being enclosed into my world (metaphorically, acting as a second womb).

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[39]One may find an analogy with Genesis, in the difference between the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The image of the ocean has the advantage, philosophically, to be an actual experience, which make the two ways to look at it, which instantiate what the metaphors in Genesis point to as dynamical designations, pre-statical designations [using the terms introduced in *A formal window on phenomenal objectness*]; this allows to '*touch*' what differenciate them.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him
shall not perish but have eternal life. - **John 3:16**

We can well imagine what Nicodemus would have responded to this: *how could anyone live forever?* Again we have to search for what '*eternal*' and '*life*' refer to. For the later, we can think about what *feeling alive* means; I do feel alive when I see the world as a field of discovery [as children do], which is made possible by the opening of my own world and the presence of *meaning*. For the former, we can see that *eternal* can mean *everlasting*: eternal life refers to the idea that the feeling of life is everlasting, *as long as I exist.*

The idea of eternal life goes deep into the understanding of the soul: when it has eternal life, it remains still; ceasing to search frantically and every-*where* in the material dimension of the world that which it can't find there - meaning.[40][41] This, I believe, makes possible to interpret Christianism in a rational and yet faithful way: it is this eternal life which describes the natural direction of the will, while the love of Christ is the way to dwell in this direction.[42]

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———— **Imperative of creation** ————

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So God created man in his own image - **Genesis 1:27**

That God created man in his own image means in particular the following: God created human beings as creators. Equivalently, it is in the nature of human beings to create, not in the sense their factual existences consist in this, but in the one that they cannot properly live without this.

This is, I believe, the reason behind R.Rolland's words: "*Créer, c'est tuer la mort*" and "*Mourir ou créer*". I think that we should not understand creation as *manufacture* here, but rather maintaining oneself there where that which at the limit on my world reveals itself, making it present, visible. I think that the necessity of creation should be made clear by the following. Surviving as a physical being implies avoiding certain situations in which one is threatened. For this reason one has to remain constantly vigilant. Naturally this concerns in particular the intentions of others, on which one tends to project the possibility of negation of oneself - which is another effect of the mental technology of representation, for this projection is the result of distortion of the representation. This is a factor of enclosing [*death* here refers to the absence of life]. It is only by *really* seeing the other - what is possible through an understanding of oneself - that one can dismiss it.

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[40]I find it is surprising that the idea, present in *predictive coding theory*, that the functioning of the brain can be understood in terms of minimising the unexpected, remains running, considering the evidence that we, as subjects, are searching ultimately for life and the unexpected in particular.

[41]In this direction, J.Patočka (The natural world as a philosophical problem) relates the feeling of emptiness to the search for self-acceptance and the constitution of personal identity: it is because of this feeling that one questions the reason of one's existence, and subsequently searches in the world such a reason and makes what one finds the material of one's identity; consequences of this are the necessity to constantly preserve this identity [against, in particular, the fact that whatever one finds in the world to which one identifies oneself, others may well be better identified with it], as well as doubt that what is defended is really identical to the self (doubt which is justified for this is false). Another way to fill the void is to preserve a relationship with meaning. This switch in the way of thinking is the purpose of the christian idea that God loves all unconditionally and not on the basis of certain actions, of a certain earthly purpose: such purpose sets boundaries on the experience, as the consequence of the extraction of certain parts of it which serve the purpose in question while neglecting the others - it is this process which ultimately creates and maintains the void.

[42]In this direction, the self-sacrifice of Christ is meaningful as such only because it is the demonstration of meaning of a certain concept of love, and more importantly through this the striking revelation of meaning itself. It is also in this sense that Christ sacrificed for all, and for this reason that he became 'eternal'.

In the intellectual world, creation is not identical to manufacturing scripts. As a matter of fact, I remember, while reading P.Descola, *Par delà nature et culture*, that in one of the cultures that he described, '*thinking*' is defined as '*making something alive inside*' - it is a form of creation. Standing in opposition to this, the research community has acquired the belief that pure thoughts do not matter - in other words, the purpose of research is the *production* of knowledge - for thoughts have to be externalised in order for others to access them, and objective, as it is thought that it is the only way for thoughts to have an effect out-there[43]. When thinking about it, however, thoughts and written thoughts do not differ absolutely in terms of access: favoring written thoughts is uniquely the effect of culture.

Four philosophema for a research directed towards meaning. − **(i)** *Tweaked golden mean principle.* — The golden mean principle is a formula carved in front of the temple at Delphi: '*Μηδὲν ἄγαν*' (*Nothing in excess*); a call from inside oneself to remain away from extremes towards which opposite forces attract; much discussed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* whom considered the *mean* as a good in itself towards which the call points to. However when it is realised, it does not feel enough [that is one important thing to take from *Brave new world*, by A.Huxley]. However, it is *life* which the call points towards, while the mean is only a condition of possibility for it to bloom [as a consequence of the absence of attracting (destructive) forces that the mean cancel out]. This is, I believe, what R.Rolland meant by: "*Ce n'est pas la paix que je cherche, c'est la vie*", where peace refers to the mean.[44] **(ii)** *On the use of ideas* — When $\mathcal{I}$ have an idea, what should I do with it ? The response to this question appears deceivingly evident, nothing but mechanical: $\mathcal{I}$ can use it in order to build something, in order to make a position in the society of others for myself - as the one who first had it. However meaning disappears then under the weight of '*I*', the mind remains confined. Another way to look at an idea would be as a path towards other ideas, whose essence may fill the mind and the soul which loves and shelter it [tweaking the words of Heidegger, the soul is the house of meaning[45]]. The relation of a subject to the world hangs in its relation to ideas. From the domination of ideas derives the domination of ideas by other ones: this is the essence of metaphysics in the classical sense. The ideas which follow serve to carry the initial one, for the look to loose itself in the structure which assemble them, like a spectacle. In the relation to ideas hangs the society of spectacle. Historically we had the tendency, since the bourgeois revolution, to apply to ideas some schemes of thoughts which apply originally and faithfully to material goods. Noticing this lets one dissolve the opposition between spiritual and intellectual egoism [which lead to both dogmatism and nihilism] and altruism, for it is only in the material dimension of the world that they are opposed. **(iii)** *Two types of attention* — For me, meaningful creation has been essentially the product of attention, that is in particular to say that in the creation, the only process of which I am actual cause is attention. This said, one should differentiate two types of attention: *strong* attention and *weak* attention. It is the former which is involved in creation. Weak attention consists in directing the inner '*spotlight*' onto an object in the experience which is accessible for it has an '*address*' in the set of concepts which compose the conceptualisation of my world. Strong attention, on the other hand, consists in the direction of attention towards an area of experience which contains appearing wholes or concepts which are not addressed. Such an area is easily neglected precisely because of the tendency of not considering what is not

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[43]It may also be a way to prove to those who decide to whom attribute funding and who do not understand what research really consists in (that is, for me, *understanding* the world), that there is an outcome to this activity, a return on investment. Furthermore, when they are written, ways of thinking can be put into competition, on the model of political opinions.

[44]The astonishment of Rolland comes from the fact that excess saturates the reality; when after some effort one considers its negation (balance), one finds in it an idle form of wisdom.

[45]*Language is the house of being* - **M.Heidegger**

addressed [more generally that on which one does not have a certain form of *control*]. This is as well why this form of attention is more difficult. **(iv)** *The worlds and their conceptualisation* — The problem of a collective relation with 'the' world which is based on the measurable is that only creation which *extends* what has been already constructed is considered - however this not necessarily where meaning lies. In order to reconnect collectively with meaning, we should not deconstruct, especially not re-found the epistemological system. We should instead see that our collective conceptualisation of the world is one conceptualisation, amongst others. The viability of this conceptualisation equals its effect and not its adequation to experience, for this experience is formed and structured as a consequence of the conceptualisation itself. Therefore we should find a way to perceive the variety of possible conceptualisations in conceiving a common enveloping framework. This is done primarily by choosing to *actually* trespass as many borders between human worlds as possible. Determining and differentiating the concepts of world and conceptualisation makes it possible to question the effect of the conceptualisation on the world, and put an end to the meta-epistemological selection criterion of *truth*. Countering the co-stabilisation of my world and its conceptualisation, this is realising life, the infinite richness of 'the' world.

Figure 1: **G.Courbet** - *The Calm Sea*